

Fremont Peak State Park



Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at the phone number below. To receive this publication in an alternate format, write to the Communications Office at the following address.

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Fremont Peak State Park

P.O. Box 787

San Juan Bautista, CA 95045

(831) 623-4526 • Observatory: 623-2465

*At the peak, visitors
enjoy a 360-degree view
during the day,
and the night sky
provides a visual feast
for stargazers.*





Poison oak leaves turn red in fall.

At **Fremont Peak State Park**, spring and fall are the most colorful seasons. At its 3,169-foot peak the magnificent vistas of Monterey Bay and the Salinas and San Benito valleys are incomparable. Also visible from the peak are the Santa Cruz, Diablo and Gavilan Ranges, and the Santa Lucia Mountains. On a clear day it is possible to spot the Sierra Nevada Range. At night, constellations and galaxies not visible in light-polluted city skies dazzle the eye.

The 159-acre park is off State Highway 156, about 45 miles from San Jose, or 11 miles south of San Juan Bautista. The approach on San Juan Canyon Road is paved, but it winds

through canyons and over ridges; trailers or vehicles should not exceed 25 feet in length.

The weather here is changeable. Summer temperatures can reach 90 degrees during the day, and at night they can drop to as low as 50 degrees, depending on the fog layer. Winter conditions may include dense fog, ice and occasional snow. It is advisable to dress in layers.

PARK HISTORY

Native People

For thousands of years the Ohlone people (also known as “Costanoan”) lived here. Ethnographers vary on their numbers, but it is known that there were at least 50 villages, all speaking different dialects of the Penutian language.

In 1769 the people’s lives were disrupted by the arrival of Spanish missionaries and soldiers who came to colonize the area and bring the native people into the mission system. The next several decades saw a drastic decline in the native population due to a combination of food shortages, crowded conditions and epidemics of diseases to which they had no immunity. By 1850 fewer than ten percent of the Ohlone population remained.

In 2005 there were about 1,400 Ohlone people on tribal membership rolls. By studying records of their spoken dialects, several groups are reviving their traditional languages.



John C. Frémont

RECREATION

Visitors and campers can picnic and bird watch among the pine and oak woodlands, or walk along four miles of moderate trails.

Twenty oak-shaded primitive campsites with views of Monterey Bay are available first-come, first-served, though they can also be reserved. To make group campground reservations or to ensure the availability of a campsite at the primitive campground, call 800-444-7275. Guided nature walks sometimes occur during spring, summer and early fall. Be sure to bring plenty of drinking water.

WHY IS IT CALLED FREMONT PEAK?

In 1846, while California was still part of Mexico, Army Captain John C. Frémont of the Topographic Engineers led an expeditionary force into the Salinas Valley and to the top of Gavilan Peak. Ostensibly, they were there to explore and survey the area, but the group was clearly an armed force. The peak was a strategic location—Frémont could see anyone approaching for miles. Long suspicious of Frémont’s motives, Mexican Commandante General José Castro ordered him to leave California immediately. In defiance, Frémont hastily built a log stockade at the peak and raised a U.S. military flag.

However, U.S. Consul Thomas O. Larkin in Monterey sent Frémont a hand-



Interior live oak leaves

delivered letter telling him that he had to obey Castro's orders to leave. In the middle of a windy night, after his flag had blown over, Frémont gathered his troops and abandoned Gavilan Peak.

During the Mexican-American war, Frémont led the California Battalion, but in 1847 U.S. General Stephen W. Kearny censured him for his "conduct in California." Frémont was arrested, court-martialed and found guilty of mutiny, disobedience and conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline. President James K. Polk later removed the charge of mutiny, and Frémont became a U.S. Senator representing California's Mariposa area. In 1856, he ran unsuccessfully for president.

The Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West placed a commemorative plaque on Fremont Peak in 1926, and this area became a state park in 1936.

WILDLIFE

The northern slopes of Fremont Peak State Park are covered with manzanita, scrub oak, toyon and coyote brush. On southern exposures, open grasslands are green in spring and golden brown in summer and fall.

Turkey vultures soar above the canyons, as do the hawks that give the Gavilan

Mountain Range its Spanish name. The trees and brush are alive with birds, including chickadees, finches, hummingbirds, thrushes, and woodpeckers. The lucky visitor may also see or hear coyotes, snakes, deer, bobcats, raccoons and an occasional fox. Contact the park to arrange guided nature hikes.

THE OBSERVATORY

Although light pollution from urban areas can reduce views of the night sky's wonders, on Fremont Peak a coastal marine layer of clouds often masks light from lower elevations, permitting a splendid view of stars and constellations.

Volunteer astronomers began giving evening talks at Fremont Peak in 1986. Today, visitors can enjoy a short program about the current night sky and view its starry wonders from the 30-inch observatory telescope.

The programs take place from April through October on Saturday evenings without a full moon.

Contact the park for dates, times and accessibility information. It is best to arrive before sunset, because the brightness of vehicle headlights or flashlights will limit observation and disrupt astronomers' night vision.

The dedication and donations of members of the Fremont Peak Observatory Association, in cooperation with California State Parks, make these programs possible.



Alligator lizard



Oak trees provided acorns for the Ohlone.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Tent Camping: Campsite number 13 in Valley View Campground and campsites number 17 and 19 in Oak Point Campground are accessible. A no-flush restroom is nearby (no showers). Near the observatory building one accessible no-flush restroom and one parking space are available. A ramp permits entry to the main floor exhibits and telescope in the observatory but access to the telescope is still in the planning stages.

PLEASE REMEMBER

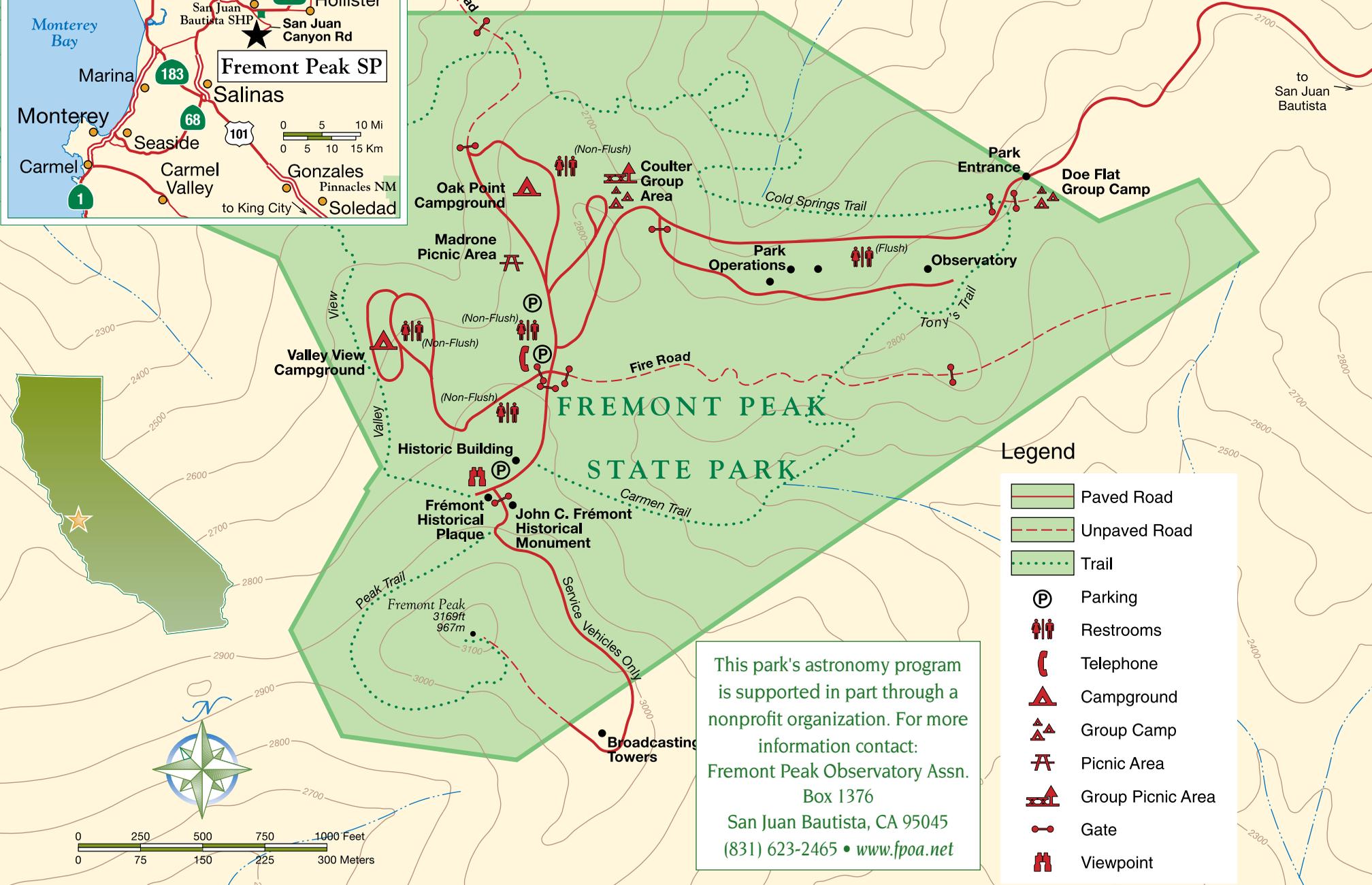
- Operating hours are from 8 a.m. to 1/2 hour after sunset.
- Parents are asked to supervise children around the telescopes.
- Do not touch any part of any telescope, especially glass optical surfaces, unless the owner instructs you on proper methods.
- If you use a flashlight, cover the end of it with a piece of red cellophane wrapped with a rubber band to hold it in place.



NEARBY STATE PARK

- San Juan Bautista State Historic Park, in San Juan Bautista at 2nd and Washington Streets (831) 623-4881/4526

Fremont Peak State Park



Legend

- Paved Road
- Unpaved Road
- Trail
- Parking
- Restrooms
- Telephone
- Campground
- Group Camp
- Picnic Area
- Group Picnic Area
- Gate
- Viewpoint

This park's astronomy program is supported in part through a nonprofit organization. For more information contact:
 Fremont Peak Observatory Assn.
 Box 1376
 San Juan Bautista, CA 95045
 (831) 623-2465 • www.fpoa.net

